'A'-level pupils and students beginning religious studies in colleges and universities to dispassionate discussions of some of the central issues of their subject. The purpose of each book is to indicate the nature of the issue, the questions raised by it, and the main directions in which thinkers have looked for answers to such questions. It should thus provide a firm foundation on which further study can be built.' So much for the aim. What Hyam Maccoby has in fact written is an apologetic, often polemical, sometimes idiosyncratic view of the nature of first-century Jewish society.

Maccoby covers a wide variety of topics at great speed but without sacrificing commendable clarity in his writing. Brevity naturally spawns superficiality, but he finds time for some interesting observations on particular New Testament texts. What is more disturbing in an introductory survey of this kind is the bland assumption, which permeates the book but is especially blatant in chapter 10 ('Love of Neighbours'), that rabbinic material from any period can be used to describe first-century Pharisaism, which Maccoby equates with mainstream Judaism. His case for treating rabbinic texts as he does can of course be argued (though I believe it to be mistaken), but at least the problems ought to be made explicit and the counter-arguments presented for refutation. If lack of space precluded such objectivity, that is the fault of the series' editors, who demand too much clarity on too many complex issues within too small a compass.

MARTIN GOODMAN


It is a pleasure to welcome this fine compilation of selected passages of tannaitic literature. The long introduction and extensive and helpful explanatory notes are written with exceptional clarity and almost always with judicious balance. The author is commendably careful to indicate areas of scholarly uncertainty and it seems unnecessary for a reviewer to dwell on those few issues, mostly concerning the political background of the Pharisees and rabbis, on which he finds Maccoby's own position hard to accept. The selection of texts does full justice, so far as it is possible within a book of this size, to the variety of topics and genres within rabbinic literature. Maccoby has succeeded in including a remarkable amount of the most interesting passages, but at the same time he has provided a sufficient supply of standard rabbinic discussions to give new readers a feel for the nature of rabbinic texts and an ability to grapple with those texts on the rabbis' own terms. In sum, this book should be of great service in discouraging over-simplification about rabbinic Judaism by the New Testament students at whom it is aimed—provided, of course, that they can afford the price, which is rather exorbitant for a paperback, and that they do not take the lazy option of turning straight to the somewhat subjective summary on pages 46–8, 'The Main Ideas of the Early Rabbinic Literature', rather than perusing the wealth of evidence for the rich diversity of rabbinic thought laid out by Maccoby in the rest of the book.

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